

Obviation:  
what is its scope,  
and is it due to competition?

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# The classical notion of obviation

The subject of a subjunctive clause is disjoint in reference from the attitude-holder subject of the next higher clause.

1. \* Je veux que je parte.

I want that I leave.**subj**

'I want for me to leave' (Ruwet 1984/1991)

Following John Goldsmith's translation of Ruwet, also Portner, I will use *for DP to VP* as the English subjunctive in this context.

Ruwet also gave examples where obviation is weakened.

## Ruwet 1984/1991, weakened obviation

- [39]a. ?Je veux que je sois enterré dans mon village natal.  
I want for me to be buried in my native village.
- [41]a. ?Je veux que je puisse attaquer à l'aube.  
?I want for me to be able to attack at dawn.
- [46]b. Ah! Je voudrais que je sois déjà parti!  
Oh! I would like for me to be already gone!
- [49] Je veux que tu partes et que je reste.  
I want for you to go and for me to stay.
- [68]a. Je veux que je sois très amusant ce soir.  
I want for me to be quite amusing tonight.
- [80]b. ?Je ne veux pas que je me trompe de clé (encore).  
?I do not want for me to mix up the keys (again).

## Some questions

What is a good characterization of the divide between the cases where obviation is in full force and those where it is weakened or disappears?

Are obviation(-like) effects restricted to subjunctives?

If not, what is the umbrella under which they all fit?

What causes obviation (where it obtains)?

# Probe two theories, using Hungarian, 1

Farkas 1992, subjunctives:

Obviation occurs in subjunctives under WANT when the subject is RESPonsible for bringing about the complement situation.

Why? The infinitive is better suited to express RESP, and so it blocks the subjunctive.

**The view from Hungarian:**

- Indeed, RESP correctly predicts obviation under WANT.
- But, obviation exists in complements of HOPE and REGRET. These verbs only take indicative complements in H.

**So, blocking is out. Is there a more promising account?**

## Probe two theories, using Hungarian, 2

Kaufmann 2019, directives:

A contradiction between the director's beliefs:  
uncertainty (POSS not- $p$ ) and certainty (MUST  $p$ ).

WANT and HOPE do involve uncertainty.

REGRET does not. Here the offense is reminiscent of the negation of sincerity conditions in illocutionary acts or thoughts (Searle 1969, Shoemaker 1996).

Introspective access to, or control of, the complement situation cannot be called into question in the matrix.

Farkas 1988, 1992

RESP

- The responsibility relation  $RESP(i, s)$  holds between an individual  $i$  and a situation  $s$  just in case  $s$  is the result of some act performed by  $i$  with the intention of bringing  $s$  about. If so,  $s$  is the (possibly) intentional situation and  $i$  its initiator. Initiator is similar (but not identical) to agent.
- **Obviation**: The infinitive is best suited to the case where the individual linked to the matrix and the complement subjects bears RESP to the complement situation. In this case, the infinitive **blocks** the subjunctive [if it is available in the language].
- Intends to capture Ruwet's obviation data, but offers a very different explanation. Blocking is not semantic, even though the conditions refer to RESP, a semantic notion.

## Hungarian: RESP draws the line correctly

... if the following cases don't qualify as \*initiated\* by the agent, and thus are not instances of RESP:

- actions performed due to an urge or by accident,
  - actions requiring the authority, direction, power, or cooperation (action or even inaction) of others.
- So, RESP is descriptively useful for any theory.
  - The demarcation line is not syntactic (unless a lot of pragmatics and context is encoded in covert syntax).
  - The Hungarian contrasts are much sharper than the French and English, but all go in the same direction.



Agentive verbs in complement – **obviation** (under normal circumstances!)

2. # Azt akarom, hogy távozzam.  
it-acc want.1sg that leave.**subj**.1sg  
'I want for me to leave'

3. # Azt akarom, hogy meglátogassam Marit.  
it-acc want.1sg that pfx.visit.**subj**.1sg Mari-acc  
'I want for me to visit Mary'

Non-agentive complements – **no obviation**

4. Azt akarom, hogy jó jegyeket kapjak.  
'I want for me to get good grades'

5. Azt akarom, hogy egészséges legyek.  
'I want for me to be healthy'

6. Azt akarom, hogy ne essek le.  
'I want for me not to fall'

Urges, mistakes and accidents, even if the complement verb is agentive – **no obviation**

7. Fogjál le! Nem akarom, hogy megöljem a gazembert.  
`Hold me down! I don't want for me to kill the rascal'  
(= I don't want for it to happen that I kill him;  
= / = I have no desire to kill him)
8. Magasságiszonyom van. Nem megyek fel a toronyba,  
nem akarom, hogy leugorjak.  
`I have the fear of heights. I'm not going up the tower,  
I don't want for me to jump'  
(= I don't want for it to happen that I jump)
9. Nem akarom, hogy (véletlenül/tévedésből) az  
egészséges lábat amputáljam.  
`I don't want for me to (accidentally/by mistake)  
amputate the healthy leg'

Dependence on the authority or the co-operation of others, even if complement is agentive – no obviation

10. (to fairy offering to grant wishes) Azt akarom, hogy legyőzzem a sárkányt és feleségül vegyem a királylányt.  
‘I want for me to kill the dragon and marry the princess’

11. (actor to director) Azt akarom, hogy táncoljak is ebben a jelenetben.  
‘I’d like for me [=my character] to dance in this scene’

12. Azt akarom, hogy (csak/ne) ÉN látogassam meg Marit.  
‘I want for it to be {  $\begin{matrix} \text{me} \\ \text{only me} \\ \text{not me} \end{matrix}$  } who visits Mary’

*the subject alone can't make the clause true*

## New data: Obviation in indicatives without competitors

Obviation-like effects arise with *remél* ‘hope’ and *sajnál* ‘regret’ when the attitude-holder is solely responsible for the complement situation, and with *remél* ‘hope’ also when the complement describes a direct experience.

But in Hungarian, the complements of these verbs are indicatives, and these verbs only take indicative complements (no infinitives, no subjunctives).

(English *hope* and *regret* also take indicatives, but not only indicatives.)

# Some background on Hungarian

- **Mood.** Hungarian is indicative-heavy. Way fewer infinitives or subjunctives than in Western Romance or English. E.g.,

	INF	SUBJ	IND
<i>akar</i> `want'	+	+	
<i>követel</i> `demand'		+	
<i>elhatároz</i> `decide'			+
<i>remél</i> `hope'			+
<i>sajnál</i> `regret, consider [it] regrettable, wish [it] weren't the case'			+

- **Focus** in Hungarian is visible in constituent order. In (13h-14h), there is *\*no focus\** on post-V `the cat.'

### 13. Remél 'hope' [simult. present compl.]

- a. Remélem, hogy benne vagyok a csapatban.  
`I hope that I'm on the team'
- b. Remélem, hogy nem untatlak.  
`I hope that I'm not boring you'
- c. Remélem, hogy biztonságban vagyok.  
`I hope that I'm safe'
- d. Remélem, hogy egyenesen állok.  
`I hope that I'm standing straight'  
*unless in front of a mirror*
- e. # Remélem, hogy fél lábon állok.  
`I hope that I'm standing on one leg'
- f. # Remélem, hogy (nem) szédülök.  
`I hope that I (don't) have vertigo'

## *Remél 'hope' [simult. pres., cont'd]*

g. # Remélem, hogy ugrándozok.

`I hope that I'm jumping up and down'

h. # Remélem, hogy simogatom a macskát.

`I hope that I'm stroking the cat'

h'. Remélem, hogy a MACSkát simogatom.

`I hope that it's the cat that I'm stroking'  
*when room is pitch dark*

i. # Remélem, hogy próbálok segíteni.

`I hope that I'm trying to help'

j. Remélem, hogy csak ÉN ugrándozok.

`I hope that only I am jumping up and down'  
*if not sure what the others are doing*

14. *Remél* 'hope' [immediate past compl.  
the immed. foreseeable future is similar]

- a. Remélem, hogy megkaptam az állást.  
    'I hope that I got the job'
- b. Remélem, hogy nem untattalak.  
    'I hope that I wasn't boring you'
- c. Remélem, hogy biztonságban voltam.  
    'I hope that I was safe'
- d. Remélem, hogy egyenesen álltam.  
    'I hope that I was standing straight'
- e. ?? Remélem, hogy fél lábon álltam.  
    'I hope that I was standing on one leg'
- f. ?? Remélem, hogy (nem) szédültem.  
    'I hope that I (didn't) have/d vertigo'



*Remél* 'hope' [immediate past, cont'd.  
the immed. foreseeable future is similar]

g. ?? Remélem, hogy ugrándoztam.

'I hope that I was jumping up and down'

h. ?? Remélem, hogy simogattam a macskát.

'I hope that I was stroking the cat'

h'. Remélem, hogy a MACSkát simogattam.

'I hope that it's the cat that I was stroking'

i. ?? Remélem, hogy próbáltam segíteni.

'I hope that I was trying to help'

j. Remélem, hogy csak ÉN rugdostam az ajtót.

'I hope that only I was jumping up and down'

## Overview of *remél* 'hope'

HOPE presupposes that **the hoper doesn't know**.

Either she has no way of knowing, or she isn't confident what it is that she is doing / experiencing.

If the complement is **episodic simultaneous present: outright bad (#)**, if subject bears RESP

(jumping up and down, stroking the cat),  
and **if subject has direct experience**

(having vertigo, standing on one leg),  
**in both cases, when she is confident what it is...**

If the complement is episodic past or future:  
weird (??) if no recollection/prediction is strange.

## RESP seems relevant in two ways

If the individual linked to the subject of the “obviative clause” is the intentional **instigator**, then

- (i) it **is up to her** whether she brings about that situation (event); and
- (ii) she has the same kind of **internal perspective** of the event as a **direct experiencer** of a state.

WANT and REGRET are sensitive to (i), but HOPE is sensitive to both.

Or rather, HOPE is really sensitive to direct experience, including “intentional action as direct experience.”

*Sajnál* `regret = consider [it] regrettable,  
wish [it] weren't the case'

- Past complements: All are fine (can't do anything about it)
- Simult. present and future complements:

Direct experience is fine:

15. Sajnálom, hogy szédülök.

`I wish I didn't have vertigo'

Non-RESP is fine:

16. Sajnálom, hogy benne vagyok a csapatban / untatlak.

`I wish I weren't on the team / boring you'

**RESP complement is weird ( $\approx$  WANT+subjunctive)**

17. ?? Sajnálom, hogy simogatom a macskát.

`I wish I weren't stroking the cat'

Interim conclusion:

In view of obviation in indicatives without competitors, blocking cannot be a general explanation for obviation.

How about a semantic-pragmatic clash approach to the old and the new data?

## A semantic-pragmatic account: Kaufmann 2019 on directive obviation

- Directives are subjunctives that serve as matrix and embedded imperatives and have person-number agreement, so they have 1<sup>st</sup> person vs non-1<sup>st</sup> person subjects.
- Directive obviation reflects a contradiction that arises -- if the director is identical to the instigator -- between the director's epistemic uncertainty about  $p$  and her public commitment to believing that  $p$  will come true once the instigator receives the directive. According to the former belief, **Epistemic Uncertainty (EUC), it is possible for  $p$  to be false**, and according to the latter, **Director's Anticipation (DA),  $p$  is necessarily true**, in the same worlds.
- Obviation only occurs with RESP, i.e. if subject of the imperative is the instigator of  $p$ .

## Kaufmann 2019 on directive obviation, cont'd

“Generally, directive speech acts with content  $p$  can be performed only if (i) [director]  $d$  does not take  $p$  for granted; in the semantics of the imperative, this surfaces as the **Epistemic Uncertainty Condition (EUC)**; and (ii)  $d$  possesses the relevant authority; in the semantics of the imperative, this surfaces as a combination of **Epistemic Authority Condition (EAC) and Decisive Modality (DM)**. The main idea of the semantic-pragmatic account for directive obviation is that the conventional meaning expressed by directive clauses with the respective subject settings is at odds with the contextual requirements for the felicitous use of a directive.”

(DA) If director  $d$  is publicly committed to believing that instigator  $a$  believes that  $p \in \Delta$  is R-necessary, then  $d$  is publicly committed to believing that  $p$  will come true:

$$\Box^{PB_d} \Box^{B_a} \Box^R p \rightarrow \Box^{PB_d} p$$

## Extending the semantic clash approach

Kaufmann 2020 proposes that her approach to directive obviation extends to WANT + subjunctive (cites Kempchinsky 2009 for a convergent intuition).

I'll just accept this, and move to investigate the newly discovered cases of HOPE and REGRET.

On a problem related to directive obviation in encouragements (not necessity modals), see slides 34-35.

All the discussion will be informal.



## Uncertainty—certainty under HOPE

13. f. # I hope that I (don't) have vertigo.

g. # I hope that I'm jumping up and down.

h. # I hope that I'm stroking the cat.

- $\text{HOPE}_{\text{AH}}(p) \models$  attitude-holder is uncertain about  $p$ .
- Simultaneous direct perception entails certainty of  $p$ . Likewise, simultaneous engagement in intentional action involving  $p$  entails certainty of  $p$  (unless event isn't confidently identified, cf. focus on *the cat*).
- This can be straightforwardly modeled after Kaufmann's account, although without the specifics of directives, and we must recognize direct experience as a source of certainty.

REGRET plausibly involves a contradiction,  
but not of the uncertainty--necessity kind

18. ?? Sajnálom, hogy simogatom a macskát.

`I wish I weren't stroking the cat'

⇒

`I'm stroking the cat (per factivity).

AND

It's up to me whether I'm stroking the cat (per RESP)

AND

If it were up to me whether I'm stroking the cat,  
I wouldn't be stroking the cat'

## Tantalizingly similar: negations of sincerity conds. for illocutionary acts

- 19. # It is raining but I don't believe it.  
(Moore's paradox)
- 20. # I promise to join but I don't intend to.
- 21. # I don't want to know but who killed the lady?
- 22. # Turn left but it's a bad idea.

(Searle 1969: a sincerity condition specifies a psychological state of the speaker; the performance of the illocutionary act expresses that state.)

## Need not be acts: thought is enough

Shoemaker (1996, 74-76) “What seems to me too little noticed is that there is something paradoxical or logically peculiar about the idea of someone's *believing* the propositional content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence, whether or not the person gives linguistic expression to this belief. What really needs to be explained is why someone cannot coherently *believe* that it is raining and that she doesn't believe that it is, despite the fact that the conjuncts of this belief can both be true... Consider the proposition that is the conjunction of [“It is raining, but I don't believe that it is raining”] and the proposition that the speaker believes this... That *is* self-contradictory... “

$Rain \ \& \ \neg Bel(Rain) \ \& \ Bel(Rain \ \& \ \neg Bel(Rain))$  entails  
 $\neg Bel(Rain) \ \& \ Bel(Rain).$

Need not have plain negation of sincerity  
condition: expressing uncertainty is enough

19'. # It is raining but it may not be raining.

20'. # I promise to join but I may not intend to.

21'. # I may not want to know but who killed the lady?

22'. # Turn left but it may be a bad idea.

Likewise (when read as simultaneous report)

23. # I may have vertigo, I may be cold, I may be itching

24. # I may be jumping up and down, I may be scratching

25. # Do I have vertigo? Am I jumping up and down?

# A common thread

A **psychological state** of the speaker (Searle 1969)

**Self-knowledge**, introspection, first-person access  
(several essays in Shoemaker 1996)

Costantini 2016 on **self-knowledge** in subjunctive  
complements of Italian epistemic predicates (*pensare*)

An **internal perspective** (event *de se*, in addition to  
individual *de se*) in infinitive but not in subjunctive  
(Schlenker 2005, 2011)..

## Conclusion

Obviation-like effects aren't restricted to the subjunctive or to complements that have mood-competitors.

Accounts of obviation in HOPE+indicative and REGRET+indicative can be modeled after Kaufmann's account of directive obviation, as **contradictions** between the beliefs of one and the same person as the attitude-holder and as the complement subject, although with different specifics.

The **commonality**: in the bad cases, introspective, first-personal insight into, or control of, the complement situation is called into question in the matrix.

The proper conceptual unification and grammatical characterization call for further research.

# Appendices

- Internal perspective (individual and event *de se*)
- 1<sup>st</sup> person directives in suggestions



## Internal perspective $\approx$ individual & event *de se* (Higginbotham, Schlenker, Zu)

- ***De se*** reading of subject:  
there can be no error through misidentification.
- The “controlled” pronominal subject in  
 $DP_i \text{ want/hope/regret } [ \text{that pronoun}_i VP_{subj/indic} ]$   
is no doubt read *de se* in the cases relevant to us.

A further contrast, relevant to us:

- Just individual *de se* (**no internal perspective**)  
*I remember that I fell down / walked to school.*
- Also event *de se* (**internal perspective**)  
*I remember PRO falling down / walking to school.*

# Schlenker 2005, 2011

The (new) De Se complementizer is a simultaneous  $\lambda$ -abstractor over individuals  $x$ , events  $e$ , and worlds  $w$ :

$$\llbracket \text{that}_{x\_i, e\_k, w\_n} F \rrbracket^{c,s} = \lambda x'_e \lambda e'_i \lambda w'_s \llbracket F \rrbracket^{c,s[x\_i \rightarrow x', e\_k \rightarrow e', w\_n \rightarrow w']}$$

*I remember PRO falling*

$$w^* e^* \text{I rem. that}_{x\_i, e\_k, w\_n} [w_n e_k (\text{PRO}_i \text{ falling})]$$

*I remember that I fell*

$$w^* e^* \text{I rem. that}_{x\_i, e\_k, w\_n} [\exists e_m: e_m \approx e_k] [w_n e_m (I_i \text{ fall})]$$

Here  $e_m \approx e_k$  indicates that the events  $e_m$  and  $e_k$  occurred at the same time.

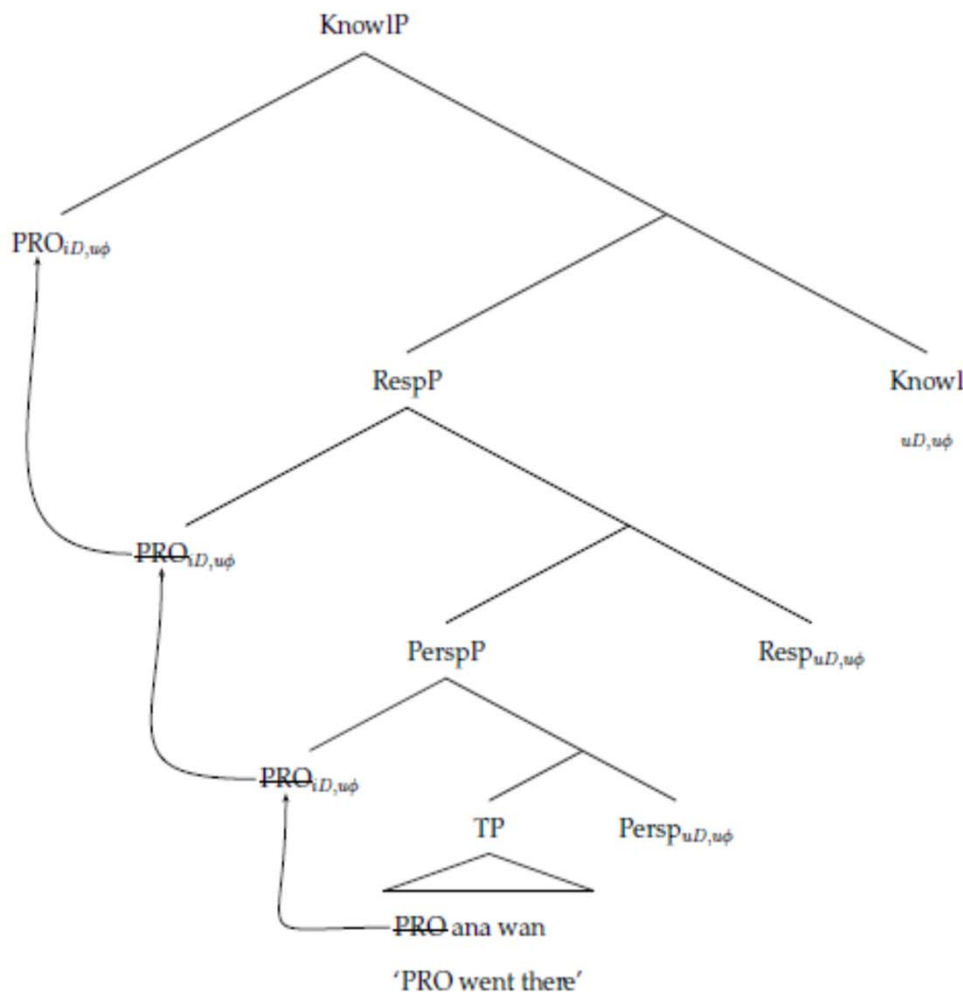
Both sentences are De Se wrto the subject, but only *I remember falling* is De Se wrto the event argument.

# Zu 2018, Newari conjunct subjects require linking to the seat of knowledge, RESP, and internal perspective

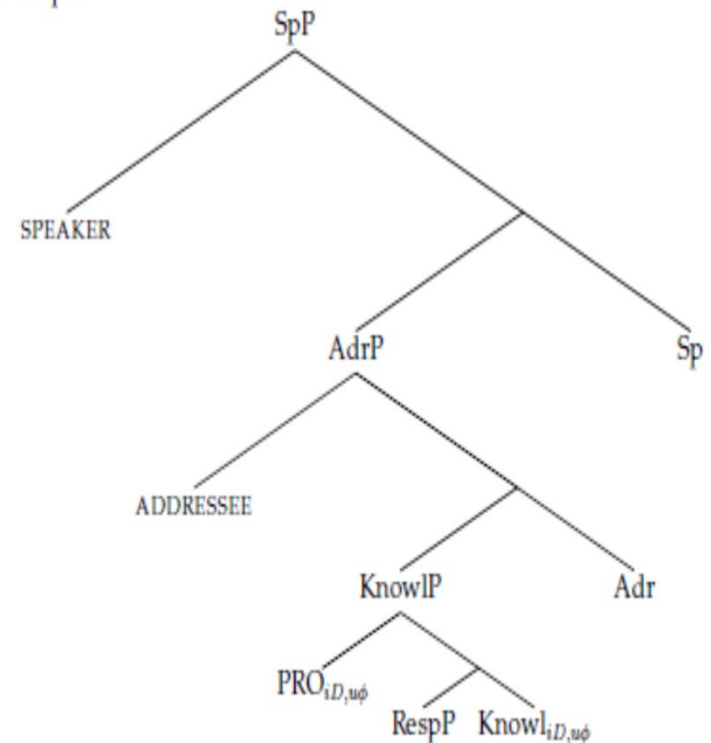
(368) a. *ji ana wan-a*  
LABS there go-PST.CONJ

'I went there.'

b. Step 1



(369) Step 2



As a final step, the  $\phi$ -features of the speaker percolate down to every link of the agreement chain... spelled out...

1<sup>st</sup> person directives are obviative  
both as commands and as suggestions

- Kaufmann's contradiction between EUC and DA relies on the imperative having a necessity modal.

Commands and suggestions can be distinguished:

- # You must pick any apple. (#MUST +  $\forall$ -FCI *any*)
- # Pick any apple right away. (#command +  $\forall$ -FCI *any*)

- $\forall$ -FCI diagnoses non-necessity modals (Dayal 2013):

- ✓ You may pick any apple. (MAY +  $\forall$ -FCI *any*)
- ✓ Pick any apple if you wish. (suggestion +  $\forall$ -FCI *any*)

26. # **Rögtön** menjek haza! (#command, 1sg)

**right.away** go.subj.1sg home

27. # **Nyugodtan** menjek haza! (#suggestion, 1sg)

**at.ease** go.subj.1sg home

There must be a critical aspect of directives that is neutral to their modal force

Searle's preparatory condition for requests, advices, commands, etc.:

It is not obvious to both  $S$ [peaker] and  $H$ [earer] that  $H$ [earer] will do  $A$ [ct] in the normal course of events of their own accord.

If  $H$ , the potential instigator, is uncertain whether she would do  $A$  in the absence of receiving a request, advice, or command, then we should be able to derive that only some  $S$  that is not identical to  $H$  can be the source of an effective request, advice, or command to  $H$ . For this purpose, the specific modal force of the directive will not make a difference.

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